House Keeps Secrecy Shroud on Intelligence Outlay

7-11-79

By Katherine Ellison
Washington Post Staff Writer

The House approved a multi-billion-dollar intelligence authorization bill on a voice vote last night after rejecting a move to disclose how much money Congress was authorizing.

The measure now goes back to the Senate.

By a vote of 321 to 79, the House rejected an attempt by Rep. Romano L. Mazzoli (D-Ky.) to amend the bill. Mazzoli would have required the president to reveal in November the total amount of spending authorized for foreign intelligence in the coming fiscal year.

The bill authorizes spending for the CIA and parts of the National Security Agency, the FBI, the Defense Intelligence Agency, the Drug Enforcement Agency and the departments of Defense, Energy, Treasury, Army, Navy and Air Force.

Mazzoli said he wanted to make the total spending figure public as a "concrete demonstration that Congress is very serious about its responsibility to develop cost-effective national intelligence." He said the step would create a "presumption of openness which would serve as our best protection against slipping into the abuses of the past."

The administration has said it would not object to the disclosure of an aggregate figure. Mazzoli also pointed out that several congressional oversight committees on intelligence have recommended disclosure.

Speaking against the amendment, Rep. J. Kenneth Robinson (R-Va.) said it would cause "further erosion of our intelligence capability brought about by further disclosure." Robinson protested that "our adversaries, the Soviets, will feast on these additional facts that they will get for free."

Rep. Bill Burlison (D-Md.) said "the act of disclosure would only be symbolic and it would lead to revelations of more and more detail about the intelligence budget."

Burlison maintained that Mazzoli's attempt "represents a lack of confidence in the intelligence agencies" and in congressional oversight.

Speaking in favor of the amendment, Rep. Donald J. Pease (D-Ohio) said it would strike a "meaningful balance between the taxpayers' right to know how their dollar is spent and the need for effectiveness in streamlining the budget of the intelligence community."

Mazzoli, a member of the House Committee on Intelligence, said The New York Times and The Washington Post have "routinely run" estimates of the aggregate figure that are "almost on the money."